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THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH IN MODERN SOCIETY

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Signs are not wanting that the attitude of many serious-minded modern men toward the church, as toward religion in general, is beginning to change from one of criticism, or at best of indifference, to one of interested and often of sympathetic reconstruction. We have just come through a period when it has been the fashion everywhere to charge the church with even more than her admittedly lengthy debit account of sins of omission and commission great and small: no editor, scholar, speaker, cartoonist, paragraph-writer, or even up-to-date preacher so blind as to do her reverence, and none so humble as to hesitate to tell her what she must do to save herself from impending shipwreck and abandonment on the sands of time. Says a keen observer writing as recently as 1911:¹

A perusal of current literature in reference to the church reveals how much the rage it has become to censure the blunders of organized religion. There are fashions in magazine articles as well as in dress, and the present vogue is, by any means, to drub the church. Recent essays in which, with force and cleverness, both friends and foes have pointedly remarked upon ecclesiastical failures . . . leave the impression, not only that there are grievous errors to be criticized, but that some people are having rare sport criticizing them.

But there are indications that the tide has recently turned, and that the ecclesiastical ark is beginning to feel the lift of the rising

¹ H. E. Fosdick, "Heckling the Church," *Atlantic Monthly*, December, 1911.

current of religious interest about her. One of the most encouraging evidences of this is the perceptible increase, in certain leading seminaries at least, of the number, and the still more noticeable improvement in the quality, of the young men who within the last ten years have been entering the service of the church as ministers and missionaries. A new spirit of hope and determination and enthusiasm is abroad in religious gatherings and church assemblies, even when and sometimes just when they frankly face their modern difficulties at their worst. Two religious leaders of national repute have recently said that, whereas a few years ago they found and shared in a general feeling of depression about the church's work and future, they were now discovering everywhere signs of new life and faith, and were convinced that not far ahead of us is an era of general revival of spiritual interest.

And this recognition is outside the church as well as in it. One of our most eminent sociologists, in the foreword to his last book, speaks of the situation (in regard to the commercialism which he finds rampant in America) as having in the last five years "decidedly improved, especially the attitude of the church toward commercial evils."¹ It is striking to see how many social workers, realizing the potential influence for social betterment of the 218,147 churches in America, with their membership of 35,000,000, are speaking and writing in book and magazine on the relation of the church to society, and summoning her to her high social calling.² And particularly significant is the fact that one of the most notable and widely read novels of this year,³ by a writer of serious purpose and high standing, deals directly with the function of the church in modern life as its central problem, sets forth this problem as one which thoughtful men are more and more recognizing as fundamental, and offers a solution at once constructive and hopeful.

The causes of this new interest in the church are not far to seek below the surface of modern life. The recognition that "man is incurably religious" is leading to the further insight that so ele-

¹ E. A. Ross, *Changing America*.

² Cf. Graham Taylor, "Church and Community," a department of the *Survey* each month.

³ Winston Churchill, *The Inside of the Cup*.

mental and powerful a human interest must have its permanent organized expression, and that the church will survive and flourish in spite of, and perhaps long after, its critics, because it answers to a deep and ineradicable human need. Even among those who have no interest in the organized church, the sense of interest in, and desire for, those higher and deeper things of the spirit with which the church has to do is perceptibly strengthening. Says a well-known literary and public man who has always kept close to the beating heart of our American life, in connection with the appearance of his last book:¹ "Possibly the most notable change in our national life in the last decade is the deepening of its note. Whereas formerly attention was given largely to things of the surface, of late the mind has been directed more to those things which lie beneath." The heroine of the recent novel just referred to is typical of many of her countrymen in this: that having pursued and won conventional success, she has found it empty, and having followed various ultra-modern views of life, social and spiritual, she has found them unsatisfying; and her longing for a vital religion is finally satisfied only in the liberalized and revitalized Christian church. The spiritual aspiration and longing of the modern world is a reality to which many a straw of casual conversation, many a leaf from current literature, many a title-page of recent books on religion, give inconspicuous but significant evidence.

Still more significantly, the emergence in unexpected places of powerful spiritual impulses, like the passion for social service which is leading so many modern idealists into a new and real type of religious experience,² and the rise of movements as genuinely religious in spirit as some of our newer social and political tendencies, show what great stirrings have begun beneath that surface of the spiritual life of humanity, on which the church has complacently drifted for many generations. In short, we live in days of profound significance and momentous change, when the church, if she will, may regain something of the prestige and influence which she has admittedly lost of late years, and may rise to the new demands of the modern age and answer to its new desires, with an adequacy

¹ Thomas Nelson Page, *The Land of the Spirit*.

² Cf. E. T. Devine, *The Family and Social Work*, chap. i.

which shall give her a part not less indispensable, though possibly less conspicuous, than of old in the shaping of the new age that is to be.

At such a time, and particularly after such a period of theological transition as that through which we have just been passing, it is appropriate to face afresh the question of the function of the church in human society, and to attempt to restate the reasons which justify her support and guarantee her future as a permanent necessity among human beings endowed and organized as we are, and as our children will be after us. Especially is it timely, thus early in the new age into which modern science and industry and the modern social conscience have combined to lead us, to ask what special service the church may render, and what peculiar opportunities and responsibilities confront her, in the characteristic conditions of the age in which we live. Our subject falls naturally, therefore, into two parts: one dealing with the permanent functions of the church in human life, the other with her contemporary tasks in our modern time.

It should be said also that in thus thinking of the church we do not assume any presuppositions, historical or theological, as to what the church is or ought to be, and that we do not use the word itself in any esoteric or technical sense. Questions of history, polity, and doctrine, that have bulked so large in most discussions of this subject, we waive entirely: important as they may be in other connections, they surely yield in urgency to the previous question which is on the lips of so many and in the hearts of more today: Whatever the church's past, what can she do in the living present, and has she any future? What we mean by the church is what the ordinary man means when he asks these questions—a social group formed by the union of individual Christians for common worship and service. Whether this group be an informal company of Christians seeking fellowship with each other and with God through Jesus Christ, or an organized local congregation federated with other such local groups into a denomination, or whether it think of itself as a single national or international organization that is supreme over its local branches, matters not for our present purpose. It does matter, however, that we should remember that we are considering, not the fortunes or

functions of religion in general, but those of the social institution which it has created for its own cultivation. That religion is a permanent element in human nature and life may perhaps fairly be taken for granted among men who think on these things, and is assumed in this article. It is at least conceivable, however, as the theory of some radical Protestants seems to be, and as the practice of very many lukewarm church-members seems to imply, that, while religion may abide, the church has outlived its usefulness. Whether this is actually the case is precisely our question.

I. THE PERMANENT FUNCTIONS OF THE CHURCH IN HUMAN SOCIETY

One of the most universal elements of spiritual experience among normal and honest men everywhere is the deepening realization that in the higher ranges of our lives we human beings are anything but self-sufficient. It is not simply that deeply religious men discover that they are ultimately dependent upon God, and cannot live without him; it is also, and no less, that we all discover that in our moral as well as in our religious lives we are dependent upon, and cannot live without, each other. The economic and intellectual interdependence of mankind—the extent to which we draw not only our living, but our language, habits, and ideas themselves out of the social atmosphere in which we live and move and have our being—is a fact familiar to every modern thinker. But there is need, in our still too individualistic age and country, for continued emphasis on the fact that this interdependence is moral and religious as well. It is only the spiritual genius whose sense of God is keen enough, whose conscience is sensitive enough, whose will is strong enough, to be a hermit or a recluse in his higher life. The prophet may dwell in the desert, and appear among men only to deliver the word of the Lord that has come unto him. But the ordinary man must worship with his fellows and feel the moral support of his friends, if he is to keep his spiritual life sound and strong; and the less of a native genius he be in such matters, the more dependent is he upon such social reinforcement.

This is partly due, no doubt, to the almost tidal ebb and flow of our inner life, to the incalculable but inevitable influence of our spiritual moods upon us. There are certain moments of insight

and exaltation in the life even of the dullest man, when his intuition of religious truth is quick enough, and his sense of moral values keen enough, to make him for the moment at least spiritually independent. But there ensue long periods, constituting in the aggregate overwhelmingly the larger part of his life, when he can keep himself steadily open to the highest influences and amenable to the highest standards of life, only by joining with others whose mood may supplement or overcome his own, and with whom he may co-operate in the creation of that common mood, more powerful than any individual state of mind, which every student of social psychology knows.

An almost equally important factor in the situation is the weakness of the individual will of most men. Aside from those extraordinary men whose steadily masterful genius is largely a native endowment of will-power, and aside from the moments of heroic determination that come to all of us, it remains true that for the vast majority of men the knowledge of duty is far in advance of the practice of it; that some kind of moral support is necessary to hold them even within reach of their best; and that all the inspiration of example and exhortation that others can consciously or unconsciously bring to bear on their hesitant or wavering wills will be none too much to make them the men and women that they know they ought to be.

In view of this social interdependence of all our higher life, the indispensable function of the church as a permanent necessity and support of the spiritual interests of human society becomes evident. As by combining the limited strength or wisdom or capital of many individuals into an army or a council or a corporation, a collective achievement is made possible which no single person could have attempted; and as within such a social group standards of efficiency and attainment are maintained to which many of the weaker would not individually attain alone, so may a group of people with moral aspirations and Christian purposes pool, so to speak, their spiritual capital in a church, and draw on this common spiritual stock for support in times of their personal religious doubt or obscurity, or moral strain. That such spiritual support from the common capital is a reality, let the experience of all who have found help in the

public worship of the church at times of individual need, or who have felt the steadying power of the Christian public opinion of the church at times of moral strain, bear abundant witness.

The number of us who at some time or other are kept from religious "backsliding" or moral lapse by the sustaining power of public opinion is perhaps, if we only knew, larger than we should like to think for the sake of the credit of individual human nature; but at least it shows how powerful and how indispensable are the social sanctions that hold us in our proper places. The human universe, like the solar system and the whole cosmos of which it is a part, is held in place and swung in orderly and dependable orbit by the influence of its individual members on each other; gravitation is in this sense a spiritual as well as a physical force—and in both realms is fundamental and essential. The church, in other words, has as its first permanent function in human life the support of the otherwise morally and religiously insufficient individual (as most of us are) in his higher life. In this sense, social and psychological rather than dogmatic, the church may fairly be called an "ark of salvation" for struggling individual swimmers on the sea of spiritual experience.

A second aspect of the church's function is closely related to this first. Not simply is the moral and religious life of most men supported and stimulated by the common spiritual life of the church; it is very often itself originated as an offspring from that life more or less directly. For it is true of spiritual life as of physical, that it springs from previous life; religious experience is quickened in one soul by and from the experience of others, and moral resolve is fired by the example or exhortation of an inspiring character. Now while it is true that this creative contact of personalities is not seldom a matter of direct personal influence ("personal work" is the traditional phrase) in which the church as such has no share, it is also true that a great many people are not themselves directly in touch with any spiritually quickening personality of this sort, and can come into such life-giving contact only through the church in which such personalities gather and are accessible. And not only so, but the church herself, like any social organization, develops a corporate life of her own that is different from, and stronger than,

the lives of her members individually or even in the aggregate. The "life of the church" is a very real spiritual entity, as every live member of a living church knows. And this common or corporate life is often as potent as any individual influence to beget new life in others. It is no accident that conversions usually take place in churches or as a direct result of church work, and at special times and seasons of spiritual travail of the common soul. Life from life is nature's law; and the corporate as well as the individual spiritual life can bring forth and bear.

Nor is it simply contemporary life that thus has power to reproduce itself. Vital spiritual experience has an astonishing quality of timelessness—it seems never to lose the power to quicken new life from itself. The experience and example of ancient "saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs" have almost as much power of inspiration over us as over their contemporaries and successors—and in many cases quite as much or even more. The "life of the church" thus becomes much more than the aggregate of its component individual lives, more even than the corporate life which all these with each other create. It includes also in a very real sense the timeless experiences of all those who, "having done the will of God, abide forever," and likewise the accumulating or rather enlarging common life of the church of all the ages. This "communion of saints" thus becomes a corporate life wider and deeper and mightier than that of any age or group, and able continually to call forth new life to reproduce and enrich itself.

Abstract and intangible as this argument may perhaps seem, it appears as by no means unreal or invalid when we consider the history and experience of all the "Catholic" churches, and their sheer power to perpetuate themselves *as institutions*, with a minimum of the personal contact of individuals which Protestantism has always magnified. Still more does it so appear when we consider the relation of the church to that greatest but one of all Christian sources and springs of religious experience—the Bible. The Bible as we have it is essentially a church book. Though not written for ecclesiastical purposes, it still remains true that it was collected, transmitted, preserved, and interpreted, *in the church*. In other words, this wonderful self-revelation of original Hebrew and

Christian piety, this unique record of religious experience, has been handed down to us in and through the church, and is a kind of visible transcript of the spiritual life which the church has always possessed and transmitted. And as the Bible has always been, like an overflowing vessel of "living water," "quick and powerful" to call forth Christian experience and stimulate Christian living in the successive generations, so has the church ever been the channel through which has poured down through the ages the inexhaustible stream from which the vessel was originally filled.

Still more evident is this when we consider the relation which the church has always sustained to the most powerful of all sources of Christian life and experience—the person of Jesus Christ. In his presence, in contact with his personality as it stands forth in the Gospels, the essential Christian experience is most steadily and surely produced: there God becomes real and Fatherly and trustworthy, life becomes big with meaning and the promise of immortality, and the kingdom of heaven becomes a present task and a future hope. Now it is *within the church* that his memory, his portrait, his teachings, his spirit, have been kept alive; it is "where two or three are gathered together" in his name, that he is "in the midst." Historically speaking, it was within the church that the sayings of Jesus were first collected and treasured, and his biographies written, and there that through all the centuries since, however inadequately or distortedly at times, he has been "lifted up" to the homage and obedience and imitation of mankind. Surely not least among the age-long services of the church has been this: that it has held up before mankind steadily the most important figure in human history. And this remains in our time a permanent and indispensable function of the church—for our age needs the vision of Christ certainly not less than those that have gone before. And so long as the church, by its preaching and teaching and witness-bearing, thrusts the figure of Christ before the attention of men, not only in the sanctuary, but in the market-place and the school and the home, so long is it meeting the condition on which depends the contemporary fulfilment of his own ancient and oft-verified promise, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me."

In other words, the orthodox Catholic doctrine of the church as

the repository and guardian of an authoritative tradition is simply, as dogmas so often are, the theological perversion and intellectual incrustation of a spiritual experience. It is not *tradition* which the church ought to treasure up and transmit, but *life*—spiritual life. She becomes a channel through which the stream of Christian experience pours itself on down through the centuries, enriching itself and quickening new life as it goes. The Bergsonian philosophy, with its vivid and stimulating picture of life as a vital movement thrusting itself forward through real time into ever-new and unforeseen individual manifestations, may help us moderns to make more real to ourselves this conception of the age-long life of the church, and its relation to the individual lives of contemporary Christians who are quickened by, or spring from, it. The second permanent function of the church is thus the transmission from generation to generation of Christian life and experience in all its quickening power, and especially of those life-giving and never-failing spiritual experiences which the church has made accessible to the world in the Bible and in the person of Jesus Christ.

A third aspect of the permanent function of the church in human life appears when we consider the true relation of religion to the common affairs and routine of daily living in the average community. In times past, and in some types of Christianity today, religion has been apparently conceived as an occasional mysterious transaction or ritual act, which takes place at some special revival season or at some central and consecrated place, and by which the Divine is brought down into our human world to be adored and appropriated. It is the descent of God within the reach of man. For all real Protestants, however, religion is no occasional transaction or rare ecstasy, but an ever-renewed experience, attained through prayer and meditation and daily duty-doing and unselfish service, of the presence of the Divine in our hearts and lives in the midst of the affairs of every day. It is "the life of God in the soul of man"—in whose transfiguring light nothing can be secular save what is sinful, and in whose purifying presence nothing worthy can remain common or unclean.

At the same time, however, as we have seen, the average individual requires some social support, some objective and organ-

ized mediation, before he can catch and keep this divine presence within him. And particularly is this true where the pressure of life's daily round and common task is forever tending to conceal or to extinguish the light within. In this regard the church serves as a kind of constant conductor of the divine life and presence into the midst of every community and into the heart of every member. Not simply at some central shrine, but into the midst of every least community where "two or three are gathered together," she brings the common vision of Christ, the common experience of God. No spot on earth where two souls can meet for worship is so isolated, no house is so humble or service so barren or preacher so ill-equipped or poor, as to miss this spiritual blessing if only the seeking be sincere; and by this blessing the common life and labor of these seekers and that community may be lit up with the very presence of God. And this sanctifying and transfiguring ministry of the church is not simply universal, but also constantly recurrent. Were it only once a year or once a month, the fire might languish and die in the long intervals. But once or twice or thrice a week the social bond is renewed, the common aspiration is lifted, the common blessing comes. It is as important that this social mediation of religion should be constantly repeated so as to touch and transfigure the constantly renewed and ever-fresh pulses or periods of time that, as Bergson reminds us, make up life, as that it should touch every least and last locality where men live together.

We may perhaps illustrate this third aspect of the function of the church by the analogy of the production of steam. A ritualistic or revivalistic religion, like the old-fashioned boiler, brings the divine fire down to the outside of the undifferentiated mass of human life, and by the application of its heat there seeks to generate power. But the mass is slow to penetrate and stubborn to transform by any such purely external method. It is the function of the church to serve as the intricate system of channels in the modern tubular boiler, each local church acting as a single tube and all together carrying the divine fire straight to the heart and out through all the ranges of human life, till spiritual power is generated everywhere at once. Only so can the kingdom come in all parts and at all times of our human experience. It is thus the third function of the church

to relate religion vitally to the ordinary life of all sorts and conditions of men, at all times and places of their existence.

A fourth aspect of the function of the church in human life can perhaps be stated more simply and directly than the three thus far considered. It is that a task so vast and intricate as that to which Christianity summons its followers—the bringing-in on earth of God's kingdom and the doing of his will among men—can be adequately attempted, much less accomplished, only by an organized society. All the considerations of efficiency which have led to the modern elaboration of organization in all departments of life require a like measure of organized efficiency on the part of the church if she is to accomplish her task; and in proportion as her task is vaster, more delicate, and more difficult than that of manufacturing and marketing a commercial product, or administering a city or a state, or waging a war, must her organization be not less but more efficient. The necessity of a permanent machinery that shall survive the individual fortunes of short-lived mortals; of a division of labor that shall assign each member to the task that he can best perform; of a central administration that shall eliminate waste and duplication, and bring her full resources to bear on the most important tasks in hand; and of a constant supervision and training that shall increase the efficiency of each worker—these necessities of every undertaking that would accomplish great things through human instrumentality are laid upon the church as well.

But there remains a yet deeper reason why the Christian task can be adequately attempted only by a society; a reason which our High-Church friends have been far quicker to see and appropriate than we still individualistic "sectarians." It is, briefly, that the Christian ideal for human life is a social ideal, the Christian gospel a social gospel; and that therefore that ideal can be realized, that gospel effectively preached, only through a *society*. If it be true, as we certainly think it is, that our present social order is fundamentally un-Christian, and that our Christian task is not finished until it as well as the individuals who compose it be redeemed, and the "environment evangelized" as well as the souls that are constantly exposed to its influence; then, by the same fundamental logic which makes it impossible that a man drowning out of reach of

shore or boat should be rescued by anyone who cannot swim himself, or that an attacking fleet should ever be captured or destroyed by a defending army, it follows that this social task requires a social instrument, a *church*, for its achievement. Just as in any highly organized sport a number of picked-up individuals, however brilliant, can hardly hope to defeat a real "team," so no mere aggregation of individuals, however saintly, can hope to overcome the "kingdoms of this world" and make them "the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." As a means to the establishment of an era of brotherhood and justice and mutual service, we must have a church that is founded on, and characterized by, these same fundamental Christian principles: no other type of church can ever achieve the kingdom, nor can it be achieved without any church at all. The fourth permanent function of the church is therefore a co-operative attempt to realize an essentially social ideal.

It will be observed that these four functions are after all simply various aspects of what is fundamentally a single or at most a two-sided fact—the social nature of all human life, and the correspondingly inevitable social character of all religion and notably of the Christian religion. From this elemental fact follows directly the permanent necessity of the church in human life; and all analyses or elaborations of its functions (of which many more might be made) and all analogies illustrative of its working (of which those above are offered as suggestive merely) are really only recognitions from various approaches of the ultimate fact that "no man liveth to himself," but that "we are all members one of another."

II. SPECIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE CHURCH IN MODERN SOCIETY

While these permanent functions of the church thus inhere in the fundamental characteristics of human nature and life always and everywhere as we know it, and are thus the real basis of the church's abiding destiny, it is also true that in any age there may be special conditions urgently needing just what the church has or ought to have to give, and challenging her to press with special vigor one or another of these functions, or even to add to them others that the needs of the times or the nature of her own ideals demand. That this is notably true of our own time, that the church

is today facing at once a serious crisis and a great opportunity, has become a commonplace. Indeed, there is danger that the very recognition of our peculiar modern situation may lead us to an overemphasis on the differences between our own time and earlier ages, and to an obscuring of the permanent needs of human life which the church, now as always, must meet. The modern man is after all not so different at heart from his ancestors as some very up-to-date thinkers would have us believe. The modern world greatly needs to ponder the dictum of Goethe—"Mankind is forever advancing, but man remains ever the same"—and the modern church, in her eagerness to meet the new needs of mankind, must not cease to minister to the perennial needs of man.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the church is facing in our time a situation, fraught at once with crisis and with opportunity, such as rarely in her history she has had to meet. It has become trite to say that "conditions have changed," so that her traditional methods of doing the very work which we have insisted is her permanent function are no longer effective, and that she must either find new methods or leave her essential task undone. This is unquestionably true. But further it is also true that certain temporary functions which, under the peculiar exigencies of past ages, she then assumed because no one else was doing them, and because they were related to her own ideals, have since been taken over by other agencies created for the purpose, leaving her without the prestige which once these activities brought her. As everybody knows, she has thus handed over education to public schools and private colleges, eleemosynary work very largely to charitable organizations and to the state, and direct social reform to political parties. And yet once more: it is also true that certain characteristic changes in our modern life have deeply affected her work and considerably increased its present difficulty. Modern science, philosophy, and historical scholarship have completely changed men's ideas of the universe and of their own relation to it, and have modified profoundly the form, if not the substance, of all religious teaching. Out of the resulting period of theological transition and religious confusion we have by no means passed. And the increased complexity and high tension of modern life have made it increasingly

difficult for the church to get the ear of men, and to find sufficient opportunities to exercise to any perceptible extent an influence which must be as delicate and subtle as hers.

But these facts, as at least the younger generation of our time are beginning to recognize, constitute a challenge to advance rather than an excuse for retreat. They call for aggressive leadership to discover new methods of doing these perennial tasks in the midst of a new age. They require constructive thinking to restate the ancient truths of Christianity in such new forms as to command even modern attention. And no less do they demand a realignment of our forces: the withdrawal of our energies from certain points of assured victory on humanity's wide battlefield where we are no longer so much needed; the concentration of our forces at certain newly crucial points where the issue is still doubtful; or the seizing of some vantage points where the fighting has hardly yet begun. If there were special opportunities for service in previous ages where the church could win great prestige and strike mighty blows for the advance of the kingdom, by espousing causes and upholding interests which others were leaving to defeat, surely there must be such special opportunities in an age so tossed in transition and torn with conflict as our own. Are there such, and if so, what are they? That is our second great question.

The first great opportunity and challenge offered to the church by distinctly modern conditions grows out of the new industrialism into which the last century has carried us. The development of machinery and of the factory system, the division of labor, the concentration into cities, and, above all, the enormous increase in the volume of our American wealth due to the exploitation of our unrivaled natural resources, have combined to emphasize business standards of success until they have become the accepted standards for the measurement of values of all kinds among us; and commercialism has come in upon us like a flood. The absence of a leisure class and of a landed aristocracy, with their traditions, has favored this process. Prosperity rather than human welfare has become our national ideal, all things material or immaterial are estimated in terms of money value or cost (witness our newspaper headlines which describe everything from building sites to paintings

and opera singers by a figure with a \$ before it), and we tremble to take any great forward step in social progress for fear of its possible effects on business and profits. The rich are our national heroes of success, our aristocracy is one chiefly of wealth, and the eyes of all of us are focused on money-making as the one universally recognized road to recognition—for a man is known among us by the money he has made. A keen observer recently remarked that as a nation we were working all day to make money and then sitting up half the night to spend it—and that this seemed to be all there was to most of our personal lives. Small wonder is it that rich and poor among us have had their standards frightfully externalized, their sense for things unseen and eternal deadened, and their unresponsiveness to spiritual interests greatly increased, by this all-invading commercialism. The marked reaction of the last few years against all this has come none too soon, and may well go much farther before the balance is restored in our national life between material and spiritual interests.

The attention given to things spiritual in our national life is further lessened by the marked speeding-up of the pace of modern living. In some industries the standard pace of labor has, by means of speeding up the machinery, been actually doubled by count in the last few years. The distinguished economist in charge of the recent Pittsburgh Survey reported: "The mass of workers in the steel industry are driven as large numbers of laborers, whether slave or free, have scarcely before in human history been driven." And this speeding up has been felt all through our modern life, in our leisure and our amusements (witness the effects of the automobile) hardly less than in our industries. The result has been to make it increasingly difficult to get the attention of people—particularly the continuous attention. Nor is this to be wondered at when we remember how jaded this pace of modern life must leave nerves and minds and bodies that have been driven all the working-day at this high speed. Busy men, and women too for that matter, are very often too tired in the evening for anything but the lightest reading or the most trivial amusement, and on Sunday for anything but a trip into the country. This increased pace of modern life, instead of

leaving more leisure for higher interests, is thus making it more and more difficult to fasten the attention of busy men on anything serious outside that which occupies their working-hours.

In such a largely commercialized and highly driven life, it is perhaps more than ever in human history an all-important function of the church to witness to the reality and power of things unseen and eternal, and to make the busy modern man, whether capitalist or laborer, realize their supreme importance. She must insist that it profits neither a man nor a nation anything to gain the whole world and lose its own soul; that a man's or a nation's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which it possesseth; that it is not the will of our Father in Heaven that one of his little ones, whether overworked in cotton mills, or stifled in tenements, or starved in poverty, or corrupted with vice, should perish; that the moral order and an eternal destiny and God are the ultimate and supreme realities of existence. The church must deliver herself from the insidious taint of commercialism, and fight uncompromisingly against the worship and service of Mammon wherever it appears. She must make conscience, both individual and social, vocal and authoritative in the lives and affairs of men and of communities. She must open to driven and distraught souls, out of the possibly gloomy treadmill of their daily life, a window toward heaven. In short, she must recognize it as part of her distinctive modern task, by insisting on the infinite worth of the individual and the eternal values of brotherly human relationships, to "spiritualize democracy"; for if democracy is not spiritualized, it may too easily become merely a vast social machine for greater economic efficiency and greater personal gratification. The social possibilities opening before a truly spiritualized democracy are tremendous; but a commercialized aristocracy and a brutalized proletariat would make up a society that in the long run could produce and exalt little but mediocrity, superficiality, and frivolity. Away from such perils and toward such possibilities of democracy it is the present duty of the church to lead our modern life.

A second special opportunity for the church in our age and nation grows out of the fact that we Americans are as a people

deeply individualistic. It is one of the main secrets of our national strength and achievement that we have been so; and all the conditions of our pioneer history have tended to accentuate this national characteristic. But now that the pioneer stage of our development is largely past, and the industrial era is full upon us, it is absolutely essential, not only for our future attainments, but also for our future salvation as a people, that we should outgrow the individualism of our national youth wherein it was "every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost," and enter into the brotherly co-operation of maturity wherein we shall all recognize and act on the principle that we are all "members one of another." This is, of course, not socialism in the economic or political sense; it is socialism only in the sense of the organic unity of society in which Christianity is fundamentally socialistic, and every developed nation must also be if it is to survive. Now it is surely one of the most hopeful auguries of our national future that this sense of our organic unity, which is at least the first stage of a growing sense of brotherhood, is increasing so rapidly among us; that a social conscience is developing which feels keenly the burden of our national sins and shortcomings and will not rest satisfied till they are overcome; and that a common will is asserting itself which alone can carry us forward as a united democracy on the path of social progress.

But hopeful as are these beginnings, we yet have far to go. The forces of reactionary individualism are still mighty among us, and have on their side, not only the settled social habits and institutions of generations, but also the letter and even sometimes the spirit of our system of laws and our written constitutions. The rapid tendency to class stratification and increased class tension among us as the glaringly unequal distribution of wealth increases at a pace accelerated by our enormously enlarging production of wealth, and the emergence among our increasingly heterogeneous population of strong racial cleavages and antipathies, are centrifugal social forces which must be counteracted and overcome by stronger centripetal forces of social cohesion and brotherhood, if we are to survive as a democracy.

Further, the social agencies which we have so far developed exist

chiefly either for their own self-seeking (as in the case of labor unions, commercial organizations, and fraternal orders) or for some specific piece of social betterment (as with our societies for particular philanthropic and charitable purposes or for special objects of reform). In other words, while we are organizing rapidly into more or less sharply competing groups, each for mutual benefit within itself, and while we are attending admirably to the achievement of specific reforms as the need for them appears, we are leaving the general social sense and conscience among us to develop by itself without definite cultivation. That it does develop as a by-product of these specific social strivings is undoubted; that in these modern days God is causing it to spring forth and grow among us, "we know not how," some of us firmly believe. But is it not also plain that the development of the social sense and conscience in general, the deepening of the realization that we human beings and particularly we American fellow-citizens are really "members one of another," cannot be left to chance, to incidental by-production, or even to a kind Providence, if our social perils are to be averted and our social possibilities as the world's great experiment in democracy are to be realized?

Here, then, is the second and perhaps the supreme opportunity of the church in the peculiar conditions of modern life—to cultivate and sensitize the social conscience. She alone among all our human institutions exists for the specific purpose of making men realize that they are all brothers, children of a common Father in one great human family. Her public worship in itself is or ought to be a tremendous force working for this end: its intercessory prayers for the special needs of "all sorts and conditions of men" must stir in the heart and conscience of every true worshiper, in the most searching and appropriate way that human experience knows, the realization of human brotherhood in common dependence upon God; its sermons, if they be in any true sense prophetic, must arouse the social conscience, and exalt the common weal, and utter forth again the ancient summons of Christianity to individual repentance for the sake of the general good—"Change your life, for God is introducing among men a new order." And all the church's "work and labor of love," ameliorative, redemptive, missionary, tends or

ought to tend to deepen this sense of brotherhood to the ends of the earth. That the church often fails in this divine mission, that her social service is sometimes neutralized by her own too frequent unbrotherliness, is no refutation of her function, but rather an evidence both of its importance and of its difficulties. She is the herald and ambassador—and most of all the ministering servant—of that kingdom of God which is “not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the divine Spirit.”

And this leads directly and specifically to the third great opportunity of the church in the modern age—the definite promotion of the common welfare at the next point to be gained. In previous ages the church has not been slow to undertake specific tasks which she saw lay along the pathway toward her spiritual ideals, and which others were not undertaking. Thus in ancient times she undertook the whole work of relieving the poor and caring for the sick and disabled, which in our more advanced stage of social evolution the state has taken over. Thus in the Dark Ages she undertook the preservation of classical literature and the cultivation of science, philosophy, music, and art. Thus in our own land she has been an indispensable pioneer in the providing of education and the establishing of law and order. But now that in the course of social development these specific tasks have been measurably completed, or taken over by other and more appropriate and adequate agencies, it is for her, not to lament over lost prestige or outworn opportunities, but to press forward to meet the new needs of a new age.

That the church has not wholly lost her ancient initiative, that she is not wholly blind to the new situation, let the whole recent development of institutional and neighborhood church work in the neediest part of the cities, of redemptive agencies for down-and-out men and unfortunate women, of activities for social outlook and uplift in the country church—let the whole intricate machinery of such efficient “arms of the church” as the Young Men’s and Young Women’s Christian Associations—be at least partial evidence. Amid the spiritual darkness of Asia and Africa today the church is doing exactly the same pioneering work for civilization and education and the medical relief of human suffering, which she did for

Europe in the Middle Ages and for America in its earlier days. Along these lines, at home and abroad, her distinctive and immediate tasks clearly lie at the present time. It is always hers to undertake promptly such specific tasks as lie in the direction of her ideals and are not otherwise being performed.

When changing conditions, advancing social progress, or the development of more adequate and appropriate social machinery make it advisable for her to change her methods, or to turn over to others any of these temporary functions, she should do so without hesitation or discouragement—and press on to new and unoccupied points of social conflict or conquest. Even if, in the rapidly increasing complexity of our social machinery, she should at any moment find all the special social issues of the hour in the hands of organizations formed for these specific purposes, it would still be her important function to educate public opinion on these same issues, and to rally it in reinforcements that will insure victory at the precise points where the contemporary conflict is hottest. And always, above and beyond these changing tasks of the day, will remain those permanent functions in human life which alone would justify and require her existence. The church, in short, is or ought to be at any moment the most sensitive and responsive part of the body politic—the keenest surface of its conscience to feel the newest social danger, the strong cutting edge of its common will to press through obstacles on to higher social attainments. She is or ought to be a permanently organized force of social minute-men, ready to rush into any unexpected breach in the walls of our civilization and to hold it temporarily against the invading enemies of our human welfare until new defenses can be built; ready, too, to dart ahead and seize any commanding points of social vantage that will facilitate or protect the advance of humanity on its long march to better and higher things.

It is evident that these special duties of the church in modern life are simply concrete applications to contemporary social conditions of the permanent functions of the church in human society which were earlier considered. This recognition raises the question whether it may be possible to summarize the entire discussion in

terms of a comprehensive definition or analogy. The latter is perhaps the wiser quest to follow; since in a subject so vast and vague as this, concrete analogies that are at all accurate are often more illuminating and suggestive than any abstract definitions.

It happens that the course of social evolution has provided us with an analogy in a sphere close enough to be accurate, familiar enough to be illuminating, and practical enough to be suggestive. During the last seven centuries the colleges and universities of the modern world have become, more largely perhaps than any other institutions, the custodians of the higher life and interests of humanity. Within them the flame of pure scholarship and original research is kept alive. They train and develop thousands upon thousands of immature personalities to be worthy members in the "fellowship of educated men"—and this training is their peculiar and permanent function. But in addition they also give a partial or complete technical training for particular callings; they are constantly making new discoveries in applied science, or advancing new principles of social well-being, which are at once put to the service of society in practical life; and they are always centers and rallying-points for patriotism and public spirit. Their multitudes of alumni throughout the world look back each to his Alma Mater with a loyalty and affectionate devotion which has few if any counterparts in human life, for each man recognizes how incalculable is his debt. The alumni of each college, or of all the colleges together, are, however, only a part of that great "fellowship of educated men" of all ages and races, who are bound together by common intellectual interests, ideals, and purposes into an invisible and unorganized but most real society. But though the colleges do not train all these truly educated men, they are incomparably the best and surest schools in which students may qualify themselves to enter this timeless fellowship.

What the college is to the intellectual life of the world, that the church is or ought to be to its moral and religious life. She has always kept the flame of social altruism and of spiritual devotion burning bright. Under her molding and inspiring influence pass thousands upon thousands of immature souls, to be shaped into Christian men and women—and this is her peculiar and permanent

function. That so many of these are women and children is to a far-seeing eye a sign not of her weakness but of her glory and her opportunity—for these are the molders and the members of the coming generation. But while it is the chief and central “business of the church to make Christians,” she may and ought at the same time to enlist and train and organize workers for particular social tasks, to serve society in all possible practical ways, and to take the lead in all spiritual and social advance. Her members and beneficiaries owe her a loyalty and devotion commensurate with the spiritual blessings she has conferred upon them and upon their fellows. But all the members of these visible churches are only a part of that great fellowship of spiritually and socially minded men of all the generations, who in their relations with each other and with God their Father constitute the invisible but most real kingdom of heaven. He who would qualify himself for entrance into that kingdom can best do so within the fellowship of the church. For she is the spiritual Alma Mater of humanity, training men on earth for the eternal fellowship of the kingdom here and hereafter.